

# SENATE HISPANIC BRIEFING ROOM

## FRIST MEETS WITH DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS ON CAFTA

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist welcomed President Abel Pacheco of Costa Rica, President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic, President Elias Antonio Saca of El Salvador, President Oscar Berger of Guatemala, President Ricardo Maduro of Honduras, and President Enrique Bolanos of Nicaragua to the U.S. Senate for a meeting on May 11, 2005. The Senator expressed his deep appreciation for the strong and enduring friendship between the United States and Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua and for their commitment to making those bonds even stronger.

Frist commented on the current Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), as well as the US efforts to advance our common goal of a more democratic and prosperous Western Hemisphere. Central America continues to look towards democracy and freedom as the answer to it's future. Frist agrees with the President's conclusion that Free Trade creates the necessary fundamental institutions that promote democracy, prosperity and stability for this region. The participants in meeting also commented at how productive and historic this visit to the United States is in explaining how important CAFTA-DR is to the people of this hemisphere. Senator Frist stated "CAFTA-DR is a legislative priority and important for the US Senate to pass this Trade Agreement." Other Senators in attendance include Jon Kyle (R-AZ), Richard Lugar (R-IN), Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Trent Lott (R-MS), Craig Thomas (R-WY), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Jim DeMint (R-SC).

## HEALTH NEWS FOR THE WEEK

### HHS Announces New Program to Reduce Health Disparities

Mike Leavitt, Secretary of Health and Human Services announced the use \$95 million in grants to develop a new program to address the rising number of cancer deaths in minority and poor populations. "Our commitment to closing the health care gap among racial and ethnic minorities is unwavering," Secretary Leavitt said. "We will continue to support community-based approaches to help racial and ethnic minority populations experience the benefits of modern medicine."

The new program, Community Networks Program (CNP), was developed by HHS' National Cancer Institute (NCI). The goal of the program is to reduce cancer disparities through community participation in education, research and training. Each CNP will put together an advisory group that will work on a local level to gather information and provide support. "Community-based approaches continue to be a successful way to providing access and hope to those most in need," Secretary Leavitt said. "The CNP is a good model that will allow the communities to provide results to the community it serves."

For additional information about the Community Networks Program and grantees, go to: <http://crchd.nci.nih.gov>.

## THE SENATE THE WEEK AHEAD

The Senate will convene at 2:00 p.m. on **Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005** and resume consideration of H.R. 3, the Highway bill.

We need individuals like you to help us get the message out. Please e-mail me at [noe\\_garcia@frist.senate.gov](mailto:noe_garcia@frist.senate.gov) if you are ready to join the FRIST TEAM.

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## ADVISE & CONSENT WORKING GROUP

Four years ago on May 9th, President Bush nominated Miguel Estrada to the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals. His nomination should have gone smoothly. The American Bar Association pronounced him "highly qualified" – a rating my colleagues on the other side of the aisle once called the "gold standard." He clerked for a Supreme Court justice, and worked in both the Bush and Clinton administrations. A Honduran immigrant who won top honors at Columbia University and Harvard Law School, Miguel Estrada epitomized the American dream. But Miguel Estrada's nomination never received an up or down vote. A minority of Senators used the filibuster to stop the Senate from exercising its Constitutional duty to advise and consent. Senators supporting his nomination made seven attempts to bring his nomination to a vote. Each time, the effort failed. Finally, after enduring two years of obstruction, Miguel Estrada withdrew his name from consideration.

Unfortunately, today marks the fourth anniversary of another candidate whose nomination is likewise being blocked. Priscilla Owen, who has served on the Texas Supreme Court for ten years, has earned the praise of Republicans and Democrats alike. Judge Owen won reelection to the Texas bench with 84% of the vote and the endorsement of every major newspaper in the state. Former Justice Raul Gonzalez, a Democrat, says: "I found her to be apolitical, extremely bright, diligent in her work, and of the highest integrity. I recommend her for confirmation without reservation." And still, a minority of Senators is using the filibuster to stop the Senate from exercising its Constitutional duty to advise and consent – to vote "yes" or "no," up-or-down.

This campaign of obstruction is unprecedented. Before Miguel Estrada, the Senate had never denied a judicial nominee with majority support an up-or-down vote. In the last Congress, the President submitted 34 appeals court nominees to the Senate. Ten of those nominees continue to be blocked. Each has been rated "qualified" or "well qualified" by the American Bar Association. Each has the majority support of the Senate. And each would be confirmed if brought to the Senate floor for a vote.

Meanwhile, the other side threatens to shut down the Senate and obstruct government itself if it doesn't get its way. Instead of thoughtful deliberation and debate, a small, partisan minority is attempting to change 225 years of constitutional history. Whether on the floor or in committee, it is time for judicial obstruction to end no matter which party controls the White House or the Senate.

Senate tradition is comprised of shared values based on civility and respect for the Constitution. I sincerely hope that Senate tradition can be restored. It is a matter of fairness. It is a matter of honor. It is our Constitutional duty to give these nominees a vote.

**-Senator Bill Frist**

**Remarks from Senate Floor May 6, 2005**

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